

Crew Resource Management

Situational Awareness

Assertiveness

Decision Making

Communication

Leadership

Adaptability/Flexibility

Mission Analysis



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First Typical Day

By AW2 Ian Fralic

The brief was typical.
My flight gear check-out was typical.
Even the walk to the aircraft was typical.

I remember having to shut down for a loose latch on a cowl— a relatively common occurrence. The flight was shaping up to be an average, everyday, mine-countermeasures training mission.

I was scheduled to get safety-observer training from a senior aircrewman. I had flown with the entire aircrew many times before and nothing had been out of the ordinary. I knew the mission commander quite well; we checked in to the squadron around the same time and had been on many detachments together. Although I never had flown with the copilot before, I didn't doubt his abilities. After our 150-foot power check, we began to stream our mine-countermeasures sonar (AN/AQS-24, or Q-24, for short). The two aircrewmen on the ramp were experienced with the Q-24 and no one expected any problems.

Then the crew chief heard an unusual sound. Once he mentioned it, I noticed it as well. I placed my hand on the bulkhead and felt a vibration. We asked the pilots to check their gauges, and they said everything looked normal. Meanwhile, the sound got louder. The console operator, another senior aircrewman, got up and stood between me and the crew chief. As



AW2 Fralic is reenlisted by his cousin, LCdr. Chip Brown, USN (Ret.), a helo pilot and a former Naval Safety Center flight-data-recorder analyst, next to the salvaged aircraft.



he keyed his ICS and said, “It sounds like the main gear box,” the pilots heard the noise through his transmission. We decided to return to base to troubleshoot.

As we prepared the cabin for a possible emergency landing, the crew chief got into the jump seat to assist the pilots. The noise got louder as the pilots began to declare an emergency. A main-transmission chip light and a first-stage, main-rotor bypass light illuminated on the caution panel.

“Ditch, ditch, ditch,” is all I heard next.

“Mayday, Mayday. This is Vulcan 560. We’re going down 30 miles off the coast of Oceana, Virginia.” Those were the last words I remember hearing over the radios.

We waited for the rough landing that was expected. I remember looking at the hellhole and seeing salt spray bubble up through the sides of it. Then I heard “Pop,” followed by dead silence. The noise was gone. I looked back and watched as water rushed in, cascading over the single winch. I looked forward and saw the crew chief open the upper half of the personnel door.

He turned aft and yelled, “Stay calm.”

“Fine by me,” I thought, “I’m going over to get the raft.”

As the water reached our waist, the crew chief and I staged the life raft on the lower half of the personnel door. The rotor head still was spinning but slowing down. We saw the two aircrewmembers on the ramp outside in the water; they still were close to the aircraft. We yelled for them to come closer so the rotor blades wouldn’t injure them. When the rotor head stopped,

we began to exit the aircraft. As I was halfway out, the helicopter began a slow roll to the left side. The rushing water pushed me out the rest of the way.

As soon as I realized I was free of the aircraft, I inflated my life-preserver lobes and turned toward the raft. The crew chief already had deployed the raft, so we began helping one another in. The cold water really took a toll as I got onto the ramp; I could see my hands gripping the raft, but I couldn’t feel them. With some brotherly assistance, we all got into the raft and made contact with a Coast Guard C-130, who began to circle overhead like a vulture.

We cracked jokes as we waited for SAR to pick us up. One guy spotted the mission commander’s lunch box floating in the water and offered to retrieve it, but he said, “Don’t bother. The sandwich will be soggy.” I said, “Hey, at least we get all new flight gear.” Another aircrewman said, “Next time, I’ll put my cigarettes in a plastic bag; now I can’t relax until I get home.”

After a brief stop at USS *Bataan* (LHD-5), the HSC-26 helicopter dropped four of us off at Portsmouth Naval Hospital; the other four were picked up in an HSC-28 helicopter. We were released to go home a few hours later.

Excellent crew-resource management and proper execution of our survival skills helped us make it out alive with only minor injuries. Periodic survival training is there for a reason; make the most of it. You never know when you’ll need it on a typical day. 🦅

AW2 Fralic flies with HM-14.